

Atlantic Population Canada Geese: Current Status

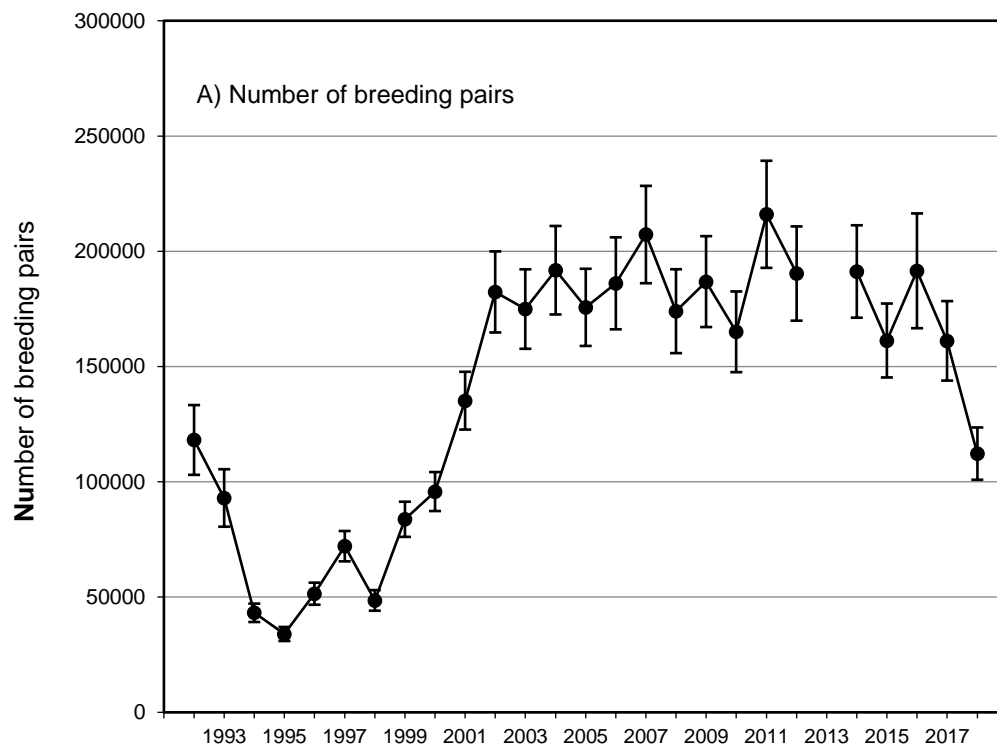
September 2018

Background:

Atlantic Population (AP) Canada geese nest throughout much of Quebec, especially along Ungava Bay, the eastern shore of Hudson Bay, and on the Ungava Peninsula. This population winters from New England to South Carolina, but the largest concentrations occur on the Delmarva Peninsula. This population is monitored by a spring survey on the above-referenced breeding ground area.

Population monitoring for Atlantic population (AP) Canada geese is based on an aerial survey of breeding pairs flown each year in the nesting area described above, coupled to ground crews who band adult and juvenile geese on the breeding grounds.

Following a number of years representing relative stability, the number of pairs in the aerial survey fell sharply from 161,000 in 2017 to 112,000 in 2018. More staggering was the decline from nearly 200,000 breeding pairs documented in the 2016 survey (graphic below).



The decline is no-doubt the result of poor nesting conditions (i.e., late spring thaws) that have occurred periodically over the last several years. The spring thaw in 2018 was much later than average and lead to poor production (number of geese hatched) on the breeding grounds. In the recently completed banding effort, crews found very few young – in fact, of the 3,000 geese banded by crews on the primary breeding area, only 30 (thirty) total new-born geese were

banded by crews, a number that has never been approached in the twenty history of conducting the on-the-ground data collection and banding on the northern breeding grounds.

More specifically, until this summer, the lowest average number of juvenile birds banded was one young per every adult bird, with a typical year averaging two young per every adult. This year crews banded .01 young per adult AP bird – or essentially zero.

The banding crews from this effort just returned at the end of August and preliminary data were shared with the states on September 11, 2018.

Management Options:

The current Atlantic Flyway management plan for AP geese calls for a restrictive season when the 3-year average of breeding pairs triggers at 150,000. The current 3-year average is just at the threshold – or 155,000. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service with input from the Atlantic Flyway Council (Council) has the latitude to make changes in the season structure prior to reaching the absolute threshold. Arguably, the parties could suggest waiting one more season to see the results of the 2019 breeding population survey.

However, the difficulty with waiting a year is that we are about to go into the 2018-19 season with very few young (essentially zero) in the flyway population. So all of the geese killed in the upcoming winter will be potential adult breeders that would return to the Ungava and Hudson Bay breeding grounds in Spring 2019. These birds represent the only adult geese remaining to support the return of AP geese to their former sustainable status.

Process and next steps:

The current AP goose hunting season is set for 2018-19 (50 days and 2 geese/day) and is not impacted by any of the discussions presented. The Council and US Fish and Wildlife Service will be meeting in late September to discuss hunting seasons for 2019-20. The Council consists of each eastern U.S. state from Maine to Florida and provincial partners from six northern jurisdictions.

The Council is informed by technical committees comprised of state and federal wildlife professionals who review technical data and management plans, including harvest prescriptions for hunted species, and present their recommendations to the formal Council. The final recommendations from the Council are then presented to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for consideration and review prior to develop of proposed federal frameworks.

An informal discussion among the technical experts on the Council suggests substantial support for a 30 day – 1 bird, restrictive season for the 2019-20 hunting season. However, the final decision ultimately rests with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We anticipate preliminary frameworks to the states for the 2019-20 hunting seasons after the first of the year and final declarations from the federal government in February 2019. We would then set our proposed 2019-2020 season and bag limit based on the federal frameworks presented at that time.